

# The Catalan Deputies and the Great War (1914-1918)

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**Abstract:** *This article focuses on the action of the Catalan deputies in the Spanish parliament during the First World War. It analyses the measures of pressure they developed in relation to social and economic consequences of the conflict, the evolution of their position in the debate between pro-allies and pro-central powers, as well as the parliamentary speeches about political and economic autonomy for Catalonia. Although the option of deciding on neutrality was widespread among Catalans, there was no unitary position. On the contrary, Catalan politicians joined for other reasons. They wanted to protect not only from the negative impact of war and profit from its benefits, but also they wish to take advantage of the situation to make visible, in an international sphere, their willingness to obtain the political autonomy for their region. Despite Catalan demands for autonomy found no concessions, the international context and the requests that had been made helped to visualize the so-called Catalan question. The Spanish Congress and the country on the whole were completely weakened after the war. However, the expectation for change and regeneration was closer than ever as the First World War had accelerated the crisis of the political system of the Restoration.*

**Keywords:** *First World War, neutrality, parliamentarism, Bourbon Restoration, Political catalan autonomy*

## Introduction

Recalling Stefan Zweig's nostalgic consideration, between 1914 and 1918 that "golden age of security" Europe had lived until then vanished.<sup>1</sup> Whereas confronted countries fought unscrupulous in the battlefield, neutral territories such as Spain enjoyed a golden age similar as it would be the "Happy Twenties", and postponed a fictitious "security" while that world was falling apart. This was the case of Catalonia, and specifically Barcelona, which in many ways became the capital of

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<sup>1</sup> Stefan Zweig, *El mundo de ayer. Memorias de un europeo* (Barcelona: Acantilado, 2002).

Europe: “It was opened to the world and the world opened up to the city, which welcomed with open arms all those men who would approach it... while things worked, all pursued themselves into risky ventures, rampant consumption, speculation and intemperate amusements... but when it all returned to normality after the end of the war and belligerent countries recovered their entrepreneurship, the bubble deflated and Spanish exports plummeted. All the money that has been made disappeared, as well as traders, spies, refugees, actresses, musicians and artists.”<sup>2</sup> This was the second gold rush Barcelona and Catalonia lived since 1871-1885, a period of economic prosperity based on the benefits of wine export, taking advantage of the devastation caused by phylloxera in French grapevines, until the end of the conflict forced to face the new reality.

Spanish neutrality involved several windfall profits, mainly in the textile industry, which exported goods worth to 14,420 tons between 1915 and 1920. In other words, exportations doubled in comparison with the period 1906-1910 (6,919 tons). This was the macroeconomic aspect of the impact the war had on the Catalan society, while the cost of living raised and originated an intense social conflict. Another aspect was the social division between pro-allies, primarily Francophiles, and supporters of the Central Powers, which resulted in a real war of opinion (or “civil war of the spirits”<sup>3</sup>). In both sides were involved intellectuals, journalists, writers and artists, as well as politicians, including the MPs.

Basically, what was being discussed was the future of the Spanish nation, between decay and regeneration: the Spanish state could declare itself neutral, but not their nation, prostrated since the loss of the last colonies in 1898. This was one of the central arguments of the *Manifesto's* *adhesion to the Allies*, written by intellectuals linked to the generation of 1914, heiress of regeneration, on 9 July 1915.<sup>4</sup> A few months later, supporters of the Germans, mainly from the Maurist Party and the Traditionalist Party, published as well their manifesto, *Spanish-German Friendship*, in which the emphasis laid on values expressed by Wilhelminism that could also be patterns of behaviour for Spain, such as authority, order and strength of the state.<sup>5</sup>

In this debate appeared two political regeneration projects: the triumph of civilization and democracy, sustained by French republican values and Britain's parliamentarism and, on the other hand, the one supported by the authoritarian, clerical and military principles of the Central Powers. In the first block joined

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<sup>2</sup>Eduard Puigventós, “Barcelona, capital d’Europa. La Primera Guerra Mundial i l’efervescència de la ciutat”, *Revista de Catalunya* 275-276 (November-December 2011), 32-46.

<sup>3</sup> Expression used by Angel Ossorio Gallardo, a lawyer from Madrid who was Barcelona's civil governor between 1907 and 1909.

<sup>4</sup> The *Manifesto* was published in the journal *España*, 9/7/1915. It was signed, among others, by the philosopher José Ortega Gasset, the writer Miguel de Unamuno, and the future president of the Spanish Second Republic, Manuel Azaña.

<sup>5</sup> *La Tribuna*, 18/12/1915.

republicans, dynastic liberals and socialists, besides part of the conservative Catalan nationalism and left-wing Catalan nationalists; while, in the second, mainly most of the right-wing, traditionalists and maurists conservatives, some dynastic liberals, some members of the Catalan Regionalist League, the Catholic press, the aristocracy, the army, the church and the king himself.<sup>6</sup>

In Catalonia, as early as the 27 November 1914 was signed a manifesto in favour of neutrality, the *Friends of the Europe moral fight's Manifesto*. Later, in April 1915, appeared the magazine *Iberia*, together with Madrid's publication *España* the key figures of the allies' intelligentsia. They received subsidies from the British and the French governments, so they became instruments of their propaganda in Spain.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the Catalans made an extra effort, providing nearly 12,000 volunteers, according to a speech of the MP Emmanuel Brousse in the French National Assembly, to the French army.<sup>8</sup> Germanophiles also had their own platforms to spread their political culture in Spain: the magazine *Germania* and the Germania's Friends' Committee, formed in Barcelona in late 1916 with the presence of noucentist intellectuals close to the Catalan nationalist Enric Prat de la Riba.

Most Spanish politicians were in favour of neutrality. From the perspective of the King Alfonso XIII, acting as a mediator for the peace, this position would allow an improvement of the state's external image.<sup>9</sup> In diplomatic parameters, Spain was closer to Entente's powers rather than to the central ones. It was a fact, with the conversion of the Spanish state in "neutral ally", practicing dynamic neutrality.<sup>10</sup> However, the neutrality was an obligated one, which expressed an objective impotence, caused by the economic and military weakness, which prevented Spain from being a contender in the war.

Despite the ideological variances and the different positions towards the war, it was the pragmatism of Catalan politicians who led their performance. Just a day

<sup>6</sup> See Fernando Díaz-Plaja, *Francófilos y germanófilos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981); Maximiliano Fuentes Codera, *El campo de fuerzas europeo en Cataluña. Eugeni d'Ors en los primeros años de la Gran Guerra* (Lleida: Universitat de Lleida/Pagès Editors, 2009); Maximiliano Fuentes Codera, "Germanófilos y neutralistas: proyectos tradicionalistas y regeneracionistas para España (1914-1918)", *Ayer* 91 (2013-3), 63-92 and Santos Juliá, "La nueva generación: de neutrales a antigermanófilos pasando por aliadófilos", *Ayer* 91 (2013-3), 121-144.

<sup>7</sup> The magazine was founded on the 10 April 1915 and lasted until the 22 February 1919. It was the informal structure of the Brotherhood's Committee with the Catalan volunteers. In this respect, Joan Safont, *Per França i Anglaterra: La I Guerra Mundial dels aliadòfils dels Catalans* (Barcelona: A Contra Vent, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel Brousse was deputy for the department of Pyrénées-Orientales representing the Democratic Republican Party. About the Catalan volunteers see: David Martíenz Fiol, *Els "voluntaris Catalans" a la Gran Guerra (1914-1918)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1991); Joan Esculies and David Martínez Fiol, *12,000! Els Catalans a la Primera Guerra Mundial* (Barcelona: Ara Llibres, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> King Alfonso XIII personally took charge of organizing an assistance office for the victims of the war.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Mousset, *La política exterior de España, 1873-1918* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1918).

before the declaration of neutrality made by the Prime Minister, the conservative Eduardo Dato, Catalan institutions reacted immediately. The president of the Catalan Commonwealth, a structure that unified the four Catalan provincial councils since April 1914 in order to obtain certain political autonomy, summoned corporations and Catalan MPs in an Economic Board, on 6 August 1914. Prat de la Riba, initially in favour of the Central Powers, had the aim to pressure the government to adopt extraordinary measures, as it had already been done in other countries, so as to regulate credit restrictions, deactivate obstructions to export and compete to achieve a free port in Barcelona. Therefore, the Catalan political and economic elites were soon on guard in consequence of the fear generated by the fall of the Paris stock exchange on 27 July, which involved the closure of the stock exchanges in Barcelona.

At this juncture, Catalan politicians wanted to protect not only from the negative impact of war and profit from its benefits, but also took advantage of the situation to make visible, in an international sphere, their willingness to obtain the political autonomy for their region. They wanted to transform the structure of the state into a federal republic or a confederation, including, if needed, Portugal. In the words of Claudi Ametlla, director of the pro-allies magazine *Iberia*, “give universality to our cause”, convinced that only in a Europe dominated by the Allies powers it could be recognized the freedom of Catalonia.<sup>11</sup> This mission required a deep democratic regeneration of the political system of the Restoration, which since 1876 was governed by corruption and influences and was also monopolized by two parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, who took turns in the power thanks to the moderating power of the Crown, an authority conferred by the 1876’s Constitution.<sup>12</sup> Although these circumstances had not perished in the eve of 1914, they come up against increasing difficulty, given the profound decomposition of the dynastic parties, and the limited influence of the major opposition parties, socialists and republicans, besides the minority traditionalist deputies.

Despite the implementation of the universal male suffrage in 1890 – also during the Democratic six-year period (1868-1874) –, in 1914 most of Spain was under the electoral government interference. Maybe Catalonia was one of the few Spanish regions which had distanced itself from this reality, especially after the general election of 1907. Then, the majority of the Catalan political parties joined in a single electoral candidacy, *Catalan Solidarity*, which won 41 of the 44 seats Catalan districts sent to Congress of Deputies (10.75% of the 409 total seats).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Claudi Ametlla, “Catalunya davant la Guerra Europea”, *La Revista* 18 (1916), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Expressions referenced by Dieter Nohlen in analysing Restoration’s political system. Dieter Nohlen, “Ideas sobre gobierno parlamentario y práctica constitucional en la España de la época del Estatuto Real (1833-1837)”, *Revista de Estudios políticos* 62 (1968), 93-120.

<sup>13</sup> The 44 seats were distributed as it follows: 7 came from the district of Barcelona, 3 from the district of Tarragona-Reus-Falset, 13 from the provincial demarcation of Barcelona, 8 from the one of Lleida, 8 from the one of Girona and 5 from the one of Tarragona. In those years, Catalonia had

During the Great War there were three great legislature periods: 1914-1915, 1916-1918<sup>14</sup> and 1918-1919. Bearing in mind the mandate repetitions and according to the 1907 electoral law were chosen a total of 80 MPs from the Catalan districts and circumscriptions, by a one-person vote in the first ones and by a majority plural vote in the second ones. The table 1 shows the distribution of the Catalan MPS, in consonance with their political affiliation:

**Table 1: Distribution of the Catalan deputies according to their political militancy (1916-1919)**

<b>Political militancy</b>	<b>Total number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Regionalist League (Lliga Regionalista)	28	35%
Nationalist republican	13	16.25%
Reformist party	4	5%
Radical republican	3	3.75%
Federal republican	2	2.5%
<b>Subtotal republicans</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27.5%</b>
Dynastic conservative	8	10%
Maurist Party	4	5%
<b>Subtotal dynastic conservative</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15%</b>
Dynastic liberal	12	15%
Liberal Left-wing	3 (2)	3.75%
<b>Subtotal dynastic liberal</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18.75%</b>
<b>Subtotal dynastic parties</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>33.75%</b>
Traditionalist party	3	3.75%
Spanish Socialist Worker Party (PSOE)	2 (1)	2.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100% (from 80)</b>

Source: Compiled from the database of the Catalan MPs, the History of Parliamentarism Group (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), and Josep Armengol and Gemma Rubí, *Vots, electors i corrupció. Una reflexió sobre l'apatia a Catalunya, 1868-1923*, (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 2012). The total number of the deputies considered is 82, because in the course of the period studied two changes of political militancy occurred: the nationalist republican Joaquim Salvatella, who joined the liberal left-wing led by Santiago Alba – a fraction of the

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already outranged two million inhabitants and Spain was close to 20 million. Barcelona had around 700,000 inhabitants.

<sup>14</sup> This one was divided into two different periods: 1916 and 1917-1918.

dynastic Liberal Party – and the federal republican Joan Baptista Anton Salas, who joined PSOE. Both changes happened at the end of the period studied.<sup>15</sup>

As this table evidences, the first party in the legislatures considered was the Regionalist League (Lliga Regionalista), the conservative nationalist political force which won in 1918 the electoral and parliamentary majority in Catalonia. Taken together the different factions of the dynastic system, conservative and liberal, the dynastic deputies occupied the second position with the 33.75% of the seats. However, the number of republicans, joined with the main opposition party in Catalonia, the Regionalist League, together accounted for 68.75%. Yet, without forgetting the Regionalist League benefited from its accession into the liberal concentration government, formed because of the summer's 1917 political and social crisis. On that occasion, the Catalan nationalist party headed a parliamentary assembly, which tried unsuccessfully to open a constitutional process to find a reformist and not revolutionary solution, wanted by the labour movement, to the collapse of the political system.

In short, the anti-dynastic parties, the right, the Regionalist League, the left and the republican parties, with a significant presence of the progressive nationalism, represented almost a third of the representatives designated in Catalonia. It was a very different reality compared to the rest of the monarchy, as the dynastic parties still prevailed, despite the rise of socialist and republicans. Thus, the lower house was dominated by dynastic parties -fragmented and with complications to get unified leaderships-, which controlled nearly 90% of the seats between 1914 and 1923.

With this article we aim to fill a historiographical gap on the action of the Catalan deputies in reference to the neutrality position adopted by the Spanish governments. We are also going to analyse the measures of pressure developed and the evolution of their position in the debate between pro-allies and pro-central powers, a prolific discussion in the streets, in the press and also in the parliament.<sup>16</sup> Although the different Spanish governments tried to avoid this debate,

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<sup>15</sup> We express our thanks to Núria Rius, technician of the *Grup d'Història del Parlamentarisme* (History of Parliamentarism Group), who has arranged the data from the MPs elected during the period of the Great War. The results we present here come from an ongoing investigation about the actions of the Catalan MPs between 1810 and 1939. The working team, which signs this article, is composed by the director of the group, Borja de Riquer, the Professor Gemma Rubí and the PhD students Laura Canalias and Oriol Luján, who work under the supervision of the alluded professors.

<sup>16</sup> A historiographical balance on Spanish neutrality in World War I, focusing on international relations, Rubén Domínguez Méndez, "La Gran Guerra y la neutralidad española: entre la tradición historiográfica y las nuevas líneas de investigación", *Spagna Contemporanea* 34 (2008), 27-44; Gerald H. Meaker, "A Civil War of Words: The Ideological Impact of the First World War on Spain, 1914-1918", *Neutral Europe between War and Revolution, 1917-1923*, ed. Hans Schmitt, (The University of Virginia Press, 1988), 1-65. The most current bibliography on the subject, Javier Ponce, "Spanish Neutrality during the First World War", in *Caught in the Middle: Neutrals*,

since it could add more instability to the fragile dynastic politics -little had been done to integrate the new mass movements to the constitutional order-, the impact of the Great War in the parliament still remains as an unexplored field. Consequently, we focus on two mainly aspects. First, on the political position of the deputies. That is, their alignment in the debate of neutrality and political regeneration. Secondly, on the parliamentary speeches about political and economic autonomy for Catalonia.

We are aware that the current historiography is renewing both the analysis of the Spanish foreign policy and the cultural history of the war, concentrating on the involvement of the intellectuals through the study of the press and their manifestos. The historiography is also giving importance to a wide range of actors' action, but we still miss publications about the specific role of the parliament in these debates. From this point of view, we want to fill a part of this gap by analysing the performance of the Catalan deputies during the First World War.

### **The Main Issues aroused Catalan MPs' Interest**

Before addressing the main issues, we are going to refer to the political structuring of the Catalan deputies, who were divided into three major parliamentary minorities, as the groups were not allowed. The most important one was the Regionalist League, which always acted with a great inner discipline and following a well-defined strategy. Secondly, we find the Republican-Socialist minority, integrating republicans and socialists from all ideologies. The Catalan republican nationalists followed the dictates of the political conjunction or acted on their own. Finally, the traditionalist minority, which proceeded relatively alone, and the Reformist party, which tended to provide support to the Republicans. These were the anti-dynastic minorities. The dynastic block was always more passive than these minorities and they did not have the habit of involving in the debates of the Parliament. However, when it was convenient for the Catalan territorial interests, they interceded collectively.

Concerning the management of the Spanish parliament, it must be remembered that until 1919 the lower house did not act according to the standards of rationalized parliamentarism, via standing committees shaped in consonance with the subjects

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*Neutrality during the First World War*, eds. Johan Der Hertog and Samuel Kruizinga (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 53-66; Miguel Martorell, "'No fue aquello solamente una guerra. Fue una revolución': España y la Primera Guerra Mundial", *Historia y Política* 26 (2011), 17-45; Javier Ponce Marrero, "La política exterior española de 1907 a 1920: entre el regeneracionismo de intenciones y la neutralidad condicionada", *Historia contemporánea* 34 (2007), 93-115; from a cultural point of view, Maximiliano Fuentes Codera, *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial. Una movilización cultural*, (Madrid: Akal Editores, 2014); taking into account diplomacy and espionage, Fernando García Sanz, *España en la Gran Guerra. Espías, diplomáticos y traficantes* (Madrid: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014), and Eduardo González Calleja and Paul Aubert, *Nidos de espías* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2014).

each ministerial department addressed. Instead, the deputies were distributed into sections, a small replica of the congress' composition and in special commissions, where drafts were discussed before being debated in the whole parliament.<sup>17</sup>

The first legislature considered began on the 8 March 1914 and ended in December 1915 with the resignation of the Prime Minister, the conservative Eduardo Dato. The second legislature initiated with the fulfilment of the dynastic turn, since the new government was led by the liberal Count Romanones, who ruled the country until 1918. The summer of 1917's crisis caused a new change in the administration. Then, it was constituted a concentration government managed by the liberal Manuel García Prieto, which included two politicians of the Regionalist League. This cabinet was followed by another one of concentration chaired by the conservative Antonio Maura. Like the first, it also failed in the attempt to assure the viability of the political system, leading it to a profound crisis and to an increasing separation with popular aspirations.

Along those years, the role of the Catalan MPs was quite active. They were involved in classic issues as the controversy between protectionism and free trade, always attempting to protect the textile manufacturing; and in other matters, such as the electoral fraud and the administrative corruption or the colonial problem in the protectorate of Morocco, among others.

In overall, there are three main issues that concerned Catalan MPs' attention during and as a result of the First World War: the position in relation to the war, social and economic consequences which implied the confrontation, especially for the population, and the desire to achieve major economic and political autonomy. Issues, on the other hand, not only confined in the Catalan domain, but also of international concern.

First of all, the position in relation to the war was a big matter that soon aroused the attention of Catalan MPs. Although the option of deciding on neutrality was widespread among Catalans, there was no unitary position, neither among the society nor between their representatives in the Congress.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Catalan

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<sup>17</sup> The most complete work about the Spanish parliament of those years, *Con luz y taquígrafos. El Parlamento en la Restauración (1913-1923)*, ed. Mercedes Cabrera (Madrid: Taurus, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> For a contextualization of the Spanish position in the conflict, Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, *Spain, 1914-1918: Between war and revolution* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 5-26; Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, *The Foundations of Civil War. Revolution, Social Conflict and Reaction in Liberal Spain, 1916-1923* (New-York: Routledge, 2008); Enrique Moradiellos, "La política europea (1898-1939)", *Ayer* 49 (2003), 55-80; Javier Maestro, "Germanófilos y aliadófilos en la prensa obrera madrileña, 1914-1918", in *La sociedad madrileña durante la Restauración, 1876-1931*, eds. Ángel Bahamonde Magro and Luis Enrique Otero Carvajal (Madrid: Cidur, 1989), vol. 2, 319-332; Ron M. Carden, *German policy toward neutral Spain, 1914-1918* (New York: Garland Pub, 1987); about the division of Catalan positions, Maximiliano Fuentes Codera, "Proyectos contrapuestos para el catalanismo frente a la Primera Guerra Mundial: lecturas comparadas de La Veu de Catalunya y El Poble Català (1914-1915)", in *Ayer en discusión. Temas*



representatives were divided in two clearly differentiated groups. On the one hand, the Regionalist League preferred neutrality,<sup>19</sup> following the principles of the Spanish government. With this strategy, the party hoped for economic and political benefits, both for the faction and for Catalonia. Francesc Cambó, for instance, made it clear: "It is no secret for anybody the regionalist minority's viewpoint, on whose behalf I am addressing to you right now. We have always defended that the attitude of absolute neutrality in the conflict that is devastating the whole Europe is the one which was imposed by patriotism, convenience and even necessity; so whatever keeps Spain in that attitude of neutrality, adopted from the beginning by the Government, will count with our applause, and in that way the government can count on our cooperation."<sup>20</sup>

In opposition, republicans of the UFNR, which took part in the elections in coalition with the Radicals of Lerroux through the union agreed in Sant Gervasi's Pact, as well as the socialist-republican conjunction, were leaning toward the allies. Other politicians from state parties, such as the Reformist Party, also added to the allies' option.<sup>21</sup>

Initially, socialists were in favour of neutrality, but as time went by they opted for the allies. They were influenced by ideological affinities and also because of the German indiscriminate submarine war campaign, which destroyed 20% of the Spanish merchant marine. Julià Nogués, one of its spokesmen, made it explicit in the Congress during a debate about merchant ships torpedoing: "Up to now, honourable members, have been torpedoed 18 Spanish ships, for a total amount of more than 80.000 tons of our merchant marine and this, added to the loss of other boats, which whether have been sunk by mines or other accidents or have been torpedoed, raises to the number of 110.000 tones the ones that has been lost from the beginning of the war [...] I dare say to the Foreign Minister and to my country I do not know what would be better, whether to continue in this state of things or going to another situation with all the disadvantages that implied the option of being able to defend ourselves in one way or another."<sup>22</sup> This German attack led the pro-allies sectors to adopt an attitude against Germans, which resulted in the formation of an antigerman league in January 1917.

The socialist-republican minority was very belligerent with governmental attitude of neutrality's imposition and brought the question to the Congress in order to debate it, because the executive have refrained from a public discussion in every

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*clave de Historia Contemporánea hoy*: IX Congreso de la Asociación de Historia Contemporánea, eds. Encarna Nicolás and Carmen González (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Actually, within the regionalist party the position towards the war was diverse, from the initial Germanophilia of Prat de la Riba to the Francophilia of Rahola, Carner or Lluís Duran i Ventosa.

<sup>20</sup> Sessions of the Congress of the Deputies Diary (SCD): 1914-15's legislature, 2139.

<sup>21</sup> About the party's position throughout the conflict, Manuel Suárez Cortina, *El partido reformista, 1912-1931* (PhD diss., Universidad de Cantabria, 1985), 353-384.

<sup>22</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 3997-3998.

moment. In any case, the Prime Minister Romanones' Count avoided any possibility of dialogue. He did not want to discuss it in the parliament, as he initially was secretly and diplomatically favouring the Central Powers. Yet, he was about to end with neutrality in favour of the Entente, a predisposition which led to the government fall.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the previous conservative government, leaded by Dato, had banned all public meetings that could discuss about the position of Spain in the war. The internal divisions within the Spanish society in relation to the position to adopt, despite the official neutrality, were widespread in other states of Europe. For instance, in countries such as Greece, which moved from neutrality to the Entente.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the declaration of neutrality did not always respond to an effective vocation of equanimity.<sup>25</sup>

The public inhibition showed by the Spanish governments in managing the effects of the war stimulated Catalan MPs' critics. They condemned the attitude because of the harmful economic consequences that implied for the population. Cambó expressed this thought: "with this inhibition the government was once successful, so they believed that inhibition's policy should lead their entire policy; but if we can inhibit in politics, we cannot do it in economic terms [...] Tomorrow, a closing one, will raise in Spain the problem of hunger, and it will raise it for Spain, or aggravate it, because it has been already raised, the problem of lack of credit, as the old channels which stimulated its circulation have been destroyed without creating new ones, and the problem of unemployment, and in the distance a problem, the worst of all, which requires the preparation of the government in advance, are the economic consequences of the peace."<sup>26</sup>

Certainly, Catalan deputies considered and discussed about the effects of the war among civil society. That was, the shortage of essential goods and the resulting damage to the common people. The republican-socialist minority and the republicans of the UFNR were especially sensitive to this dramatic situation, but the words of Cambó showed they were not the only political parties concerned. For instance, Nogués requested government's intervention to limit the price of some basic goods and avoid, as far as possible, the harmful effects of the subsistence problems.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Josep Zulueta tried to raise MPs awareness of the penalties which suffered the population as a consequence of the war, starting with the stock market crisis which led to unemployment.<sup>28</sup> Not to mention the preoccupation of the

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<sup>23</sup> Romero Salvadó, *Spain*, 60-84.

<sup>24</sup> George B. Leontaritis, *Greece and the First World War: from Neutrality to Intervention, 1917-1918* (Boulder, East European Monographs and New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> *Small powers in the age of total war, 1900-1940*, ed. Herman Amersfoort (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> SCD: 1914-15's legislature, 3263-3269.

<sup>27</sup> SCD: 1914-15's legislature, 3842-3844, 3933-3934, 4101-4103 and 4172-4177.

<sup>28</sup> SCD: 1914-15's legislature, 2174-2180 and 2212-2215.

conservative Enric Sagnier for a typhus epidemic in the city of Barcelona and the requirement to take sanitary measures.<sup>29</sup>

Fundamentally, to face the negative impact of the war, on what most Catalan representatives agreed was the need to ensure the access to bread, as an essential good, to the whole population. From the Regionalist League, towards the exposition made by Camps' Marquis of the problems generated in purchasing bread by its high price,<sup>30</sup> to the republican-socialist minority and also to the republicans of the UFNR (*Unió Federal Nacionalista Republicana*/Republican Nationalist Federal Union), all agreed on the diagnosis. Marcel·lí Domingo, for example, adverted to the absence of flour some towns of Barcelona's province had<sup>31</sup> and Joan Salas Antón submitted an interpellation about subsistence problems.<sup>32</sup>

So many pressures became eventually decisive in order to persuade the government to approve a law, which meant the control of the state over comestibles and raw material's importation. The decision was welcomed by the republican Salas Antón, as he foresaw the text would avoid famine and excessive hoarding of provisions by individuals,<sup>33</sup> whereas representatives of Regionalist League such as Josep Bertran i Musitu or Joan Ventosa were much more critical. They were fearful of excessive government control over materials that could have an effect on agriculture and industry.<sup>34</sup>

As Johan den Hertog and Samuël Kruizinga has exposed, all neutral countries were involved in the war owing to the economic effects of the warfare. It was a conflict that settled the access to markets and raw materials, in which countries had to adapt their economy in relation to the new conditions if they wanted to overcome it.<sup>35</sup> If the neutrality in the Spanish case was almost imposed by its weak strategic and diplomatic position, in other situations of neutrality, such as in Argentina, the economic benefits were much higher, supplying foodstuff and valuable raw materials to the Entente while asserting its international position so as not completely cut trade relations with Germany, against British desires.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, the third issue that concerned Catalan MPs was the fight for the autonomy of Catalonia. They contemplated it in economic terms, but also and especially in political terms.<sup>37</sup> Along these lines, historiography has tended to relate

<sup>29</sup> SCD: 1914-15's legislature, 3678.

<sup>30</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 479-481.

<sup>31</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 406-408.

<sup>32</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 338.

<sup>33</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 2472-74.

<sup>34</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 2474-84.

<sup>35</sup> *Caught in the middle*, eds. Hertog and Kruizinga.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Dehne, "Britain's global war and Argentine neutrality", in *Caught in the middle*, eds. Hertog and Kruizinga, 67-84.

<sup>37</sup> See Agustí Colomines i Companys, *El catalanisme i l'Estat: La lluita parlamentària per l'autonomia (1898-1917)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1993).

the position of neutrality during the war, defended by the Regionalist League, as a strategy to gain the autonomy. This tactic can be explained by the will to obtain a greater scope for economic action; a new step that would lead to a considerable profit from establishing neutral zones and a free port in Barcelona.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the claim for a free port located in Barcelona was not only requested by the Regionalist League politicians, but also by most of the Catalan representatives. Discourses such as the one pronounced by the socialist-republican Pere Coromines proved it: “we have a vigorous position to take part in this commercial concurrence; it must evidence it we have raised in our sea shores the most important city in the Mediterranean; Barcelona is the city with largest population in the Mediterranean; behind our city exists the most powerful commercial and industrial area. Here is the urgency of our request.”<sup>39</sup>

The necessity of a free port in Barcelona, as had been previously granted to Cádiz, was seen as a chance to cope with the negative economic features of the war and profit from the opportunities the conflict was providing.

On the other hand, the strategy followed by the Regionalist League should culminate with parliamentary obstruction, in order to weaken the monarchical governments, make their own way to power and facilitate political autonomy.<sup>40</sup> Once again, the claim for political autonomy cannot only be confined to the requests of this political party. Even the representative of the socialist-republican minority Marcel·lí Domingo censured it in the Parliament, during his speech about the petition for Catalonia’s autonomy: “One of the mistakes made when judging the problem of Catalonia, is to assign it only and exclusively to the performance of the Regionalist League, at the representation of the Regionalist League. No. The Regionalist League is not Catalonia; The Regionalist League cannot speak itself alone on behalf of Catalonia; Catalan nationalist’s aspirations are not the aspirations which are only authorized by the body of the Regionalist League.”<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, these mainstreaming demands of economic and political autonomy, made by the Catalan deputies during the war, often not sufficiently analysed from this point of view, will lead us to a more detailed analysis we will address immediately. This reality must be contextualized in a moment of European internal boundaries redefinition, where the old empires declined and nations without state emerged, boosted by the call to self-determination recognized in the famous

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<sup>38</sup> To consult the regionalist internal discussions on the issue, *El Pensament català davant del conflicte europeu: conferències dels parlamentaris regionalistes* (Barcelona: [Lliga Regionalista?], 1915). Referring to the free port in Barcelona, Colomines, *El catalanisme i l'Estat*, 203-283.

<sup>39</sup> SCD: 1914-15’s legislature, 3155-3158.

<sup>40</sup> This perspective can be seen in Miguel Martorell and Fernando del Rey, “El parlamentarismo liberal y sus impugnadores”, *Ayer*, 63 (2003), 23-52.

<sup>41</sup> SCD: 1916’s legislature, 505-511.

Woodrow Wilson's 14 points, which were considered as a program for European reconstruction after the conflict.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Claim for Autonomy**

The European conflagration became a catalyst that propelled the Catalan nationalists to reopen their demands for political and economic sovereignty. In fact, Cambó qualified this war stage as: "a magnificent and epic age for all the countries in the world, where everything has been renewed."<sup>43</sup> This expectation for change and regeneration was precisely one of the main motivations that drove the conservative Catalans and Catalan nationalist republicans to make inquiries, amendments and speeches in order to make the necessity to renew the political system and give more autonomy to the regions understood by the government.

It became clear with the amendment the Regionalist League presented on 7 June 1916 relative to the reply's draft to the message of the crown. Cambó, in charge of defending the proposal, argued the Spanish state needed to decentralize powers to solve the sterility and ineffectiveness in which it was. He also wanted to indicate the "Catalan problem" was not merely an administrative claim, it went beyond. He clarified it was an identity problem, which had aroused because the Catalan existed as a distinctive personality from the Spanish nationality. Finally, he said the question was not going to be solved until the Spanish government recognized the Catalan nationality with all its consequences and potential benefits, otherwise it would trigger new conflicts: "It exists, of course, the Catalan town, which has a history, which has segregated from its own substance a language, which has also segregated a law, which has different characters and its owns. It will be a good or a bad thing it exists in Spain, but it exists; and it does not depend on the fact of its existence to be a good or a bad thing, but rather on the treatment it receives. According to the treatment it can be an encouragement, a protector stimulus. According to the treatment given, it is the source of a constant struggle, of an every day's fight which weakens us all and harms us all."<sup>44</sup>

A few days after, the amendment was also supported by Felip Rodés and Marcel·lí Domingo, republicans and nationalists. Both claimed, as the Regionalist League had previously requested, more autonomy for Catalonia on the benefit of the entire state. In fact, it was common to find examples of collaboration between regionalists and republican nationalists in diverse petitions of autonomy made

<sup>42</sup> Wesley J. Reisser, *The black book: Woodrow Wilson's secret plan for peace* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2012); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian moment: self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Margaret Olwen Macmillan, *Paris 1919: six months that changed the world* (New York: Random House, 2002); Arthur Walworth, *Wilson and his pacemakers: American diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (New York: Norton, 1986).

<sup>43</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 460.

<sup>44</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 444.

between 1916 and 1917, as the one related to the use of the Catalan language within the Principality and different complaints about the loss of purchasing power in provincial and town councils because of the centralization.<sup>45</sup> Even in the economic field, where usually the Regionalist League took the initiative, republicans were not left behind. As Rodés admitted, his political party had learned from the conservative Catalan nationalist to be pragmatic when defending sovereignty interests: “precisely from the men of the Regionalist League we have learned to be opportunist in these matters of material interest, as well as in all other matters of political interest for Catalonia we are opportunists, we are pragmatists.”<sup>46</sup> Even representatives of the liberal and conservative parties, such as Alfons Sala Argemí, Enric Sagnier or Enric Turull, gave speeches, which distanced themselves from their parties in order to obtain concessions in the economic field.

It is precisely this aspect of economic sovereignty petitions, as well as political ones, we wish to emphasize in this article, as the Catalan deputies were very active in this respect. Since its foundation in 1901, the Regionalist League defended the interests of Catalan industry in a Spain dominated by agricultural concerns. The nationalist party received also support from other Catalan MPs of other parties, except from the radical republicans. It was especially during the First World War these claims were most heard in the parliament. Thus, the majority of the Catalan politicians defended and wanted to revalue the Catalan industry to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the war, since their products were required by the belligerent states. If Spain took advantage of it, the country could place itself in a good financial position.

In 1914 Cambó argued that while neutrality was inevitable, it had to be given economic content to get a better international position after the war. Therefore, he reasoned it was necessary to encourage industry and provide Barcelona with a free port to trade in the Mediterranean, since the blockade of German ports and thus their maritime’s trade weakening would increase the international trade within that sea. This proposal was initially postponed.<sup>47</sup> Later on, he predicted damage to Spain, if his demands of economic renewal were not accomplished: “It will occur something unheard of, dear Deputies, that Spain will be defeated without fighting,

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<sup>45</sup> The amendment related to the Catalan language was defended by Magí Morera, from the Regionalist League (SCD: 1916’s legislature, 1079, 1206-1209) and, afterwards, Ventosa, from the same political party, demanded it to be official (SCD: 1916’s legislature, 1210-11). He was supported by Nogués, Rodés and Domingo, from the republican minority (SCD: 1916’s legislature, 1217-1218). About the complaints against centralism, Marcel·li Domingo, following the complaints of other Spanish MPs, raised the problem of the suppression of the consumption’s taxes for municipalities (SCD: 1916’s legislature, 1583-1584). Ventosa did the same in the next legislature (SCD: 1917-18’s legislature, 336-337) and he was supported by Cambó and Nogués. Albaladejo followed them (SCD: 1917-18’s legislature, 190-191).

<sup>46</sup> SCD: 1916’s legislature, 2245-2246.

<sup>47</sup> SCD: 1914-15’s legislature, 4269-4270.

that we will pay the consequences of war in greater proportion than those who have been belligerent; that Spain, in the settlement of the war pays, if not in territories, in something that is also part of national integrity, in wealth and arms that will leave Spain, for not having been able to give them employment.”<sup>48</sup>

On that account, Lluís Sedó and Joan Ventosa, from the same political party, argued that the Spanish banking and industry needed an expansion if they wanted to take profit from the neutrality. So, apart from requesting a free port for Barcelona, they demanded the formation of banks for national saving and strengthening of the industry, trade and agriculture with more credit, as well as an opportunity to improve infrastructures and roads.

Corominas and Nogués, nationalist republicans, also requested a free port and the renovation of the roads, which they considered essential to thrive.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, Turull and Sala, from the Liberal Conservative Party, demanded measures to stimulate the importation of raw materials and the exportation of manufactured goods. As two industrial cities representatives, Sabadell and Terrassa, but especially as owners of wool factories, they needed to defend the interests of the Catalan industrialists against the views of their party. Their interventions on the 23th November 1914 made it clear: they called for the liberalization of the wool market, as the shortage of this product caused many companies could not produce. Specifically, Sala argued that foreign trade was the cause of the national richness, but never the source. Therefore, they wanted to promote national industry and strengthen the internal market, providing facilities to the industries so they could produce more.<sup>50</sup> In fact, they had a great interest, since they made blankets for the army.

Despite the efforts, the measures proposed by the Catalan deputies were not reached. Both Castilian and Aragonese agrarians and the suspension of parliamentary sessions between February 1915 and May 1916 played against their wills. In fact, the closure of the Congress and the lack of economic adaptation to the international conflict reveal the particularity of the Spanish dynamic in respect to other neutral countries, whose improvements in the secondary sector prepared better their respective economies.

Even before the conflict, some countries were preparing to save their economy, such as Norway. A few months before the conflict, this country had celebrated the centenary of its freedom with an exhibition of the results achieved by the industry in order to stimulate it and increase the moral of their citizens.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile,

<sup>48</sup> SCD: 1914-15's legislature, 3263-3269.

<sup>49</sup> Corominas' discourse at SCD: 1914-15's legislature, 3155-3158. Nogués' discourse at SCD: 1914-15's legislature, 2601-2602.

<sup>50</sup> SCD: 1914-15's legislature, 2685-2689.

<sup>51</sup> Jan Normann Knutsen, "Norway in the first world war", *Folia Scandinava* 5 (1999), 44-45.

Sweden and Denmark restructured their industries to adapt to the war.<sup>52</sup> In this respect, the Netherlands adopted a law, *Abreidswet*, which allowed industries to work 24 hours a day, “because it provided employment and kept workers from smuggling at night, or going to work in Germany.”<sup>53</sup>

In contrast, during the first years of the conflict, the Spanish government did not implement any measures to promote industrial development. This difference was repeatedly denounced by the Catalan deputies, who continued with their claims, although the Congress was closed, in order to raise conscience on the need to take advantage of the neutrality. They offered conferences and wrote a manifesto to request an economic reformation that would prepare the country for the consequences of the war.<sup>54</sup> Both Spanish liberals and conservatives could not support these reforms, because they were afraid of losing the loyalty of the chiefs of the agricultural provinces, with great influence and opposed to the industrial interests. In addition, they perceived the economic demands of the Catalan MPs as a sovereign act. From the regionalist point of view, the situation was as it follows: “When the European conflict rose, Catalonia realized that neutrality would not release Spain from deep economic repercussions and from the beginning encouraged the government to take the essential measures to avoid damage and profit from the national economy. This patriotic action of the economic corporations and of all Catalan political formations, grouped together in the Commonwealth of Catalonia, did not obtained from the government a favourable reception that was worthy. It was received with foresight, as if a factious action was.”<sup>55</sup>

Far from changing the course of the administration, when the parliament resumed its activity in 1916, the government tried to pass a law, which would affect industrial interests. The finance minister, Santiago Alba, wanted to implement a tax on war windfall profits obtained by the industry and the commerce; a project which would fiscally penalize the secondary sector, but would not apply the same criteria for the primary sector. This measure was justified by the government, since the war had had contradictory effects, enriching industrial sector and impoverishing the public treasury. Thus, the tax wanted to balance the situation.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> F.Fulya Tepe, “Swedish neutrality and its abandonment”, *İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 6 (11), 2007, 183-201.

<sup>53</sup> Maartje Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 148.

<sup>54</sup> The indignation of the regionalists for the closure of the parliament, without debating the free ports’ bill, on 18th February 1915 led to a manifesto. It did not obtain any answer. So, the Catalan MPs introduce the problems encountered to the Catalan public opinion with a series of conferences. The conferences offered by the regionalists can be read in *El Pensament català davant del conflicte europeu: conferències dels parlamentaris regionalistes*, Barcelona, [Lliga Regionalista?], 1915.

<sup>55</sup> *El Pensament català davant del conflicte europeu: conferències dels parlamentaris regionalistes*, (Barcelona: [Lliga Regionalista?], 1915).

<sup>56</sup> SCD: 1916’s legislature, 1479-1484.



Obviously, this proposal generated a wave of protests from the industrialists and the Catalan deputies. Joan Ventosa, on 17 June 1916, qualified it as an economic monstrosity and as a criminal attempt to damage the industry in Catalonia and in the whole Spain. Also Cambó, the following 26 of the same month, censured the plan. He said the tax would slow down investment, move away capital and damage the production. He also considered it unfair and retroactively, which was supposed to be unconstitutional. This speech was followed by other parliamentary spokesmen: Maura, Bugallal, Juan de la Cierva, the Basque deputies and the Catalan nationalist lefties Rodés and Nougués, among others.<sup>57</sup>

Faced with such opposition, the bill on the war windfall profits was not successful. Nevertheless, the situation remained problematic for the industrial sector, which still had complications to export and import. In the Sessions of the Congress' Diary can be found many pleas from the Catalan deputies in order to reverse the situation. For instance, Manuel González Vilart, a conservative of the datist-wing, reported the difficulties faced by the Catalan manufacturers to import German needles.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, deputies from vineyards districts, like the regionalist Camps' Marquis,<sup>59</sup> stated the problems farmers had to obtain sulphur and to export their product.

Later on, most Catalan deputies established a common front against the national reconstitution's bill of the finance minister, Santiago Alba. The initiative was again not well received by the Catalan economic interests. The national reconstitution's bill was based on an ambitious plan to modernize the Spanish economy, while it would ratify extraordinary budgets, which did not provide enough measures to encourage the secondary sector. Nationalist republicans and Catalan nationalist conservatives blocked the project with various inquiries, questions and speeches.<sup>60</sup>

Cambó was one of the most active politicians in this field, but perhaps the most remarkable intervention was the one offered by Rodés on the 4th November 1916, when he denounced the political discredit the finance minister submitted his political party – republican. He also presented other proposals to modify national budgets through concrete measures, such as rethinking investments in hydroelectric power and improvements in communication networks.<sup>61</sup> In this regard, the reformist Josep Zulueta was also compelling. From his point of view, the national reconstitution project would not do more than “rectify the fundamental mistakes of this administration; as the vices and corruptions of the Spanish administration have brought us this disaster, the causes of these great inequalities’ distribution on the budget and these large differences still exist in public works; and as long as they

<sup>57</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 845 and the followings.

<sup>58</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 1621-1622.

<sup>59</sup> SCD: 1917-18's legislature, 476.

<sup>60</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 2399-2403, 2790-92 and 3021.

<sup>61</sup> See Rodés speech in SCD: 1916's legislature, 2399-2403, Zulueta's in SCD: 1916's legislature, 2790-2792 and Domingo's, in SCD: 1916's legislature, 3021.

exist [...] inspires me a real terror this administration, which is not redressed [...] has now received such a large amount of millions; as before, money that will become lost.”<sup>62</sup>

With this offensive, the Catalan deputies achieved their purpose and Alba's plan was rejected on the 16 December 1916, also with the support of Basque nationalist deputies and the dynastic conservatives' politicians. At that time, with the discredit of the minister and the social, political and economic crisis which impacted on the country, both the Regionalist League and the Catalan nationalist republicanism continued to put pressure on the government in order to obtain support for the industry. Their insistence was rewarded in the beginning of February 1917, when two draft laws, whose contents were favourable to Catalan economic principles, were presented and approved.

The first was the law of aid to new industries and development of the existing ones, an initiative to encourage the creation of new industries. The government agreed to contribute with the 50% of the initial capital of any company that would like to establish itself and accomplish the necessary conditions. The second one was the Licensing law, which aim was to enable the government to adapt budgets to the needs of the various government's departments in the exceptional circumstances of war.<sup>63</sup>

It was then, when representatives from the Regionalist League joined the governments of national concentration of 1917 and 1918. From this position, the different Catalan ministers executed an extensive program of modernization of the national infrastructures, projecting a new network of roads and railways, developing a code for mining and establishing new irrigation and afforestation projects. Nevertheless, these initiatives were insufficient to adapt the Spanish economy to the reality of the conflict. In fact, the conservative Antoni de Veciana still complained about the troubles Catalans had to move their goods within Tarragona's port, while foreign companies had more facilities.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the participation of the regionalists in the government led to discrepancies within the Catalan deputies. Most nationalist republicans denounced the actions of the League in the government, as they forgot to establish some of the demands they had previously made.

Despite the poor results, the neutrality and the atmosphere that led to the war was a good pretext for the most critical political parties to keep alive discussion about the administrative and economic centralization, civil rights or representation's problems. Although at a different level and in a different context, the process was similar to other neutral and non-neutral countries that were also shaken by demands of political regeneration. The best known of all these claims was the one for

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<sup>62</sup> SCD: 1916's legislature, 2790-2792.

<sup>63</sup> SCD: 1917's legislature, 80-81.

<sup>64</sup> SCD: 1918-19's legislature, 1222.

universal suffrage.<sup>65</sup> Thus, while in Spain the government did not pay much attention to these criticisms, the speeches here compiled facilitated to raise these questions within the Spanish society.

The case exposed about the ways in which the Catalan deputies tried to achieve greater economic and political autonomy reveals the war was an encouraging context to justify regenerative claims. These MPs made constant references to the conflict so as to vindicate their arguments. Cambó, for instance, claimed: “the European war has transformed the entire economic organization of the world, has revealed weaknesses in the economic structure of the countries; circumspections in their energy not suspected, future definitive lessons. It has already been designed the economic struggle that will follow the warrior battle and it will be relentless and fiercer.”<sup>66</sup>

Additionally, nationalist republicans such as Domingo, Rodés, Macià or Pi, among others, also used situations caused by the war to defend their arguments of decentralization. Domingo, in one of his speeches, assumed the war made his political party think about the way to act in front of the conflict: “At the outbreak of the European war, all nations had to be assessed, had to be measured, had to study their institutions, their bodies. We were also forced to review these values.”<sup>67</sup> But, most of all, the conflagration was useful to both political parties to request the immediate solution of the “Catalan problem”.

### Conclusions

Besides revolutionized the public opinion, in Spain the First World War also accelerated the crisis of the political system of the Restoration. The Parliament was alive than ever thanks to the dynastic opposition, which as far as possible encouraged the lower house to debate about the nature of neutrality. Among others, the Catalan deputies were one of the most interested parliamentarians in using the chamber to pressure the Spanish government in order to make visible their claims for autonomy and for promoting its model of industrial capitalism. The reaction of the political parties of the system was defensive. They got carried away by the usual inertia, using illiberal measures such as the closure of the parliamentary sessions and the suspension of the constitutional guarantees. Correspondingly, it is not entirely true that the neutrality debate in the parliament was non-existent. Moreover, if it was not more prolific, it was because of the confidence’s lack of the dynastic parties in open debates.

In this article, we have showed how the war helped the Catalan deputies to raise their problem, the so-called “Catalan question”, and to bring to light political and

<sup>65</sup> Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage discourse in Britain during the First World War* (Aldershot and Hants: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>66</sup> SCD: 1916’s legislature, 2330.

<sup>67</sup> SCD: 1916’s legislature, 506.

economic shortcomings of Spain. The position of the main leaders of the Regionalist League, Prat de la Riba and Cambó, towards the war evolved from a discrete germanophilia, which became confused with a strict neutral position in order to open the Catalan industry to the European markets, to give support to the allies. This change took place when the Regionalist League published the manifesto *For Catalonia and the big Spain* in March 1916. It called for a renewed Spain, articulated by Iberian countries with the Catalan conservative as its engine. In other words, the Regionalist League wanted to leave the role of opposition party to get involved in the governance of the state. Nationalists Republicans, meanwhile, relied initially on the golden opportunity the war offered, fighting with the allies for a federal democratic republic, which could recognize a political autonomy for Catalonia. With the application of the principle of nationalities after the war and the refusal of the dynastic elites to the strategy described, they saw the need to radicalize their strategy with the Irish struggle for independence as a reference.

Both political parties came together in the struggle for a greater economic and political autonomy for Catalonia. Despite the difficulties, they achieved some positive results with favourable laws to the Catalan industry. Indeed, unlike other neutral and belligerent countries, most of which had been able to react and they modernized their industry at the beginning of the conflict, Spain did not manage to do it at least until 1918, when it was too late. Therefore, the Spanish Congress, and the country on the whole, were completely weakened after the war, rather than come out stronger, as did the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Their different governments received more scope for actions, while parliaments were reinforced with authority and legitimacy.

Politically, the Catalan demands for autonomy found no concessions. Despite the fact nations without state emerged then in Europe, these claims in Spain were rejected. However, the international context and the requests that had been made helped to visualize the Catalan demands.